

Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative Cross-Site Evaluation Summary of Outcomes and Impacts, 2012-13 (Year 4)

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Six rural counties in Northeast Iowa (Allamakee, Chickasaw, Clayton, Fayette, Howard, and Winneshiek), the approximate geographic size of Connecticut and population 100,000, are working together to improve the health and well-being of children and their families in the region. To be most effective in serving vulnerable children and families, the Initiative is focusing efforts on four strategic areas: K-12 schools, early childcare, local food systems development, and active living. Early childhood was added as a new strategic area in year 4. Despite this recent addition, new policies have been created that improve access of low income and other vulnerable children to healthy, locally grown food and physical activity in the region's Head Start program and Northeast Iowa Community College's Child Development Center. What follows is a summary of outcomes and impacts brought by this collaboration and implications for children and families in the region.

Job Creation and Other Kinds of Individual Economic Opportunities

The Initiative has tracked job creation, retention and expansion related to food and fitness work for four years. Table 1 shows the cumulative results during that time. Listed is the number of **full time equivalent (FTE)** jobs created at the farm level and/or value-added jobs, as well as those created within partnering institutions and for the Initiative. We also tracked other kinds of economic opportunities that do not qualify as FTE jobs, but reflect positive economic change in the region.

Table 1: New/expanded economic development opportunities associated with the NEI FFI, 2009-2013

Economic Opportunity	Year 4 (2013)	Year 3 (2012)	Year 2 (2011)	Year 1 (2010)	Total
<i>New Job Creation, FTE</i>					
Farm-level and value added jobs*	6	8.5	15	2	31.5
Institutional buyer-created jobs**	2.5	3	0	0	5.5
FFI jobs***	.7	0	2.5	2.5	5.7
New AmeriCorps and FoodCorps Service positions****	1	1	2	2	6
Total number of new jobs created	10.2	12.5	19.5	6.5	48.7
Number of new local food producers/food enterprises^	14^^	14^^	12	8	48
Number of expanded jobs^^^	6	2.5	0.5	0	9
TOTAL NUMBER OF NEW OR EXPANDED ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES	30.2	29	32	14.5	105.7

*This category includes production-related jobs as well as jobs associated with on- or off-farm processing, distribution, and marketing.

**This category of jobs includes those created within institutions and retailers buying locally grown food (including local foods buyers/purchasing specialists, food prep jobs, and nutrition outreach coordination).

***FFI jobs were created using WKKF dollars and leveraged dollars to pay for staff to support FFI efforts.

**** FFI writes a new application to employ service members each year. The number awarded varies from year to year. Figures in the table represent the number of NEW service member positions awarded FFI each year, rather than the total number of positions for that

year. For example, in year 4 a total of 6 positions were awarded, up one position from year 3.

^Numbers in this category are not included in the category on New Job Creation because they may or may not be full-time jobs. Most new local food producers also have off-farm jobs or may be adding local food production to an existing farm. A whole new job is not necessarily created but the new local food enterprise does offer new economic opportunities.

^^ Year 3 data were updated from last year's report to include the total number of new food producers or enterprises in the 2012 calendar year. Year 4 data is partial data for the 2013 calendar year.

^^^ These are jobs that already existed but were expanded to include additional paid time spent on local foods or FFI work.

Food System Change in Northeast Iowa

Besides job growth, the Initiative tracks change in local foods commerce by monitoring gross sales of local food producers and the value of local foods purchased by institutions. These are indicators that the Initiative's work is indeed creating more robust markets for local farmers and increasing local access to good food.

- **Tracked food sales by farmers more than doubled** from year 3 to year 4. Sales of local food in Year 4 were \$7.3 million, up from \$3.6 million in Year 3. Although vegetable farms struggled due to drought in year 4, local meat and dairy operations saw growth in sales.
- **School purchases of local food were up by 40%** from \$14,444 in Year 3 to \$20,236 in Year 4, despite the challenges brought by the new school nutrition standards mandated by the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act. Of the 15 schools reporting in Year 4, 11 increased purchases of local food compared to Year 3.
- The total value of local foods purchased by non-school markets was down by 3% from \$1,197,190 in Year 3 to \$1,160,978 in Year 4, because the number of these markets reporting was down, from 26 to 18, respectively. However, the **average value of local food purchased by non-school markets in Year 4 was up from Year 3, increasing from \$46,046 to \$64,499.**
- **Northeast Iowa made rapid progress in creating a food hub in Year 4.** The new Iowa Food Hub is a project of the non-profit Allamakee New Beginnings (ANB), whose **mission is to lessen the effects of poverty** by investing in families and individuals through education and collaboration. The Iowa Food Hub meets that mission by supporting the aggregation and distribution of foods produced in Northeast Iowa to schools, grocers, and workplaces in Northeast Iowa and surrounding regions. Delivery of local food boxes to workplaces has become an essential element for making the food hub financially soluble; money earned through those deliveries covers the cost of transportation and allows remaining space on the truck to serve smaller accounts, such as schools. As of September, 2013, **nine workplaces were being served by the food hub, serving about 200 families in Northeast Iowa and the surrounding region.**
- Approximately **50 farmers are selling food through the Iowa Food Hub, many of which are marginalized farmers.** An October 2013 survey of 27 **NIFF Coalition farmers showed that 93% are marginalized** in one of three ways: female farmers, beginning farmers, or operating limited-resource farms as defined by the USDA.
- **Some functions of the FFI are being integrated into the operations of local organizations in NE Iowa.** In Year 4, the NIFF Coalition made the difficult decision to discontinue the producer mini-grant program, which they had offered for five years, to allow funds to be used for core programming. In response, leaders of the non-profit Winneshiek County Development, Inc. allocated funds to continue the mini-grant program awarding \$1500 to four local food producers in Winneshiek County.

Leveraged Funding

In Year 4, the Initiative leveraged \$17,000 more in direct funding than the previous year, raising nearly half a million dollars. However, indirect leverage was down so the total amount of funds leveraged in Year 4 (both direct and aligned) is \$634,480 (compared to \$709,071 in Year 3). Table 2 shows funding leveraged in the years the Initiative has received funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF). Over the past four years, 23% was leveraged from national/federal sources, 53% was leveraged from state sources, and 24% was leveraged from local sources within NE Iowa. The majority of total FFI related funding came from the public sector (71%), 11% came from the civic sector, 2% came from the private sector, and 16% came from the result of multi-sector collaboration. These analyses do not include WKKF funding.

Table 2: Leverage of the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative, 2008-2013

	WK Kellogg Foundation funding	Direct Leverage by NEIF&F	Aligned Leverage by NEIF&F	Total Leverage by NEIF&F	Total FFI Related Investment
Planning Phase (2008-2009)	\$500,000	\$0	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$900,000
Year 1 Community Action Plan (2009-2010)	\$400,000	\$237,093.00	\$656,059.00	\$893,152.00	\$1,293,152
Year 2 Community Action Plan (2010-2011)	\$400,000	\$278,201.81	\$86,214.00	\$364,415.81	\$764,415.81
Year 3 Community Action Plan (2011-2012)	\$400,000	\$480,568.86	\$228,503.03	\$709,071.89	\$1,109,071.89
Year 4 Community Action Plan (2012-2013)	\$300,000	\$497,523.66	\$136,956.67	\$634,480.33	\$934,480.33
GRAND TOTALS	\$2,000,000	\$1,453,387.33	\$1,507,732.70	\$3,001,120.03	\$5,001,120.03

School and Early Childhood Capacity, Practices, Customs, and Policy Change

The Initiative is committed to increasing the capacity of schools and early childcare providers to lead wellness work by engaging food service directors, students, staff, and parents in the work. A wide range of school practices, customs and policies is changing as a result, highlights of which are listed below.

- In Year 4, the Initiative worked with 16 active school wellness teams in the region, down from 18 active teams in year 3. Two school wellness teams became inactive because new administrators offered less support than previous one. The Initiative continued to offer support to these schools by providing a Resource Contact (RC), but the RC made less frequent visits to these schools than to schools with active school wellness teams, demonstrating **the need for institutionalizing administrative support in the schools.**
- FFI Resource Contacts (Americorps and FoodCorps volunteers) and work group leaders spent 599 hours in Year 4 on nutrition and local food programming in schools and the community.
- **In Year 4, two NE Iowa schools achieved an award from the HealthierUS Schools Challenge.** Central Community School District received a Bronze Award and Howard-Winneshiek Community School District received the Gold Award. These awards signify that the schools have achieved (and are committed to) maintenance of higher standards than what is mandated in the areas of physical activity and nutrition. Each award level (bronze, silver, and gold) corresponds with the level of standards met.
- **Youth engagement in the FFI work remains steady.** In Years 3 and 4, youth engagement in partnering schools was rated consistently using a scorecard. In Year 4 the number of schools with high youth engagement was 6 (33%), up from only 2 schools (11%) in Year 3. FFI is reflecting on how to sustain youth engagement given the challenges of turnover when youth graduate and competing demands on youth time.
- **Parental engagement and leadership in schools is also growing.** Although the number of schools with high parental engagement dropped slightly from 4 schools (22%) in Year 3 to 3 schools (17%) in Year 4, the number of schools at the intermediate level doubled from 4 schools (22%) in Year 3 to 8 schools (44%) in Year 4. Thus, 12 schools in Year 4 versus 7 in Year 3 had high or intermediate levels of parent engagement.
- **Several schools and early childhood care providers rewrote or expanded their wellness policies in Year 4.** Highlights from new written policies include:

- Clayton Ridge Community School District (CSD) passed a comprehensive addendum to their wellness policy, which includes nutrition education incorporated into the core curriculum, a definition of local food (sourced within 150 miles) and a percentage allocated to local farmers for geographic preferencing (10%), activity breaks, discouraging use of physical activity or food as punishment or rewards, and more.
- Decorah CSD also passed a comprehensive school wellness policy. It includes a definition of local for geographic preferencing, a garden policy, allowing the school cafeteria to buy produce from the school garden at half the market value, nutrition education, and healthy snacks in the classroom.
- Allamakee CSD modified its school wellness policy by adding that no restaurant labeled foods or carbonated beverages are allowed during meal times.
- Central CSD added provisions to their wellness policy for nutrition education and local food procurement.
- Northeast Iowa Head Start wrote its first wellness policy. It exceeds federal mandates by including specific policies on nutrition, physical activity, and parental engagement. Head Start is fulfilling the federal requirement to include nutrition education through its new Farm to Preschool program.
- Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC) Child Development Center implemented two new policies; it provided the food service director with a purchasing card allowing for local food purchases and pays for staff meals so staff can eat meals with children, thereby serving as role models eating new, healthy foods.
- Two partners installed new playgrounds to encourage physical activity—the NICC Child Development Center installed a natural outdoor playground and garden and MFL MarMac CSD installed a learning landscape.
- The Postville School Garden Club sells produce to the school lunch program, making the club financially sustainable and providing the school with low-cost vegetables.
- Although the 2013 travel tally shows a drop in the number of children actively commuting to school (walking, biking, skating, or scooting) from 22% in Year 3 to 16% in Year 4, during the week of the tally poor weather discouraged children from commuting outdoors.
- **Ten new walking schools buses were added in Year 4 for a total of 17 buses in the region.**
- **46 youth leaders participated in planning, advocating, and implementing active transportation activities.**

Impact on Youth FoodCorps and AmeriCorps service members

Interviews with 10 former FoodCorps or AmeriCorps service members who served with the Initiative reported their experience with FFI influenced their decision to continue working in areas related to food, health, or education and taught them valuable professional skills.

- All ten former service members entered professions or graduate programs related to health, nutrition, active living, and/or education.
- Three former service members entered training or internships to become farmers after completing service.
- **Seven said FFI influenced their career choice or educational path.** Four said their service with FFI helped them discover their strengths and weaknesses and gain confidence.
- Five indicated they grew in their ability to work with other people, citing competencies in teamwork, committee work, collaboration, and organizing through their service with FFI.
- Two entered an education graduate program after discovering their love of teaching during their FFI work in schools.

Changes in FFI structure

In 2012 FFI changed its leadership structure. Previously it was led by a Vision Team including community members and those paid to work for FFI. **A new structure was created to clarify roles, diversify leadership, and engage a broader range of community members in decision making.** A new Regional Leadership Council was formed, comprised of community members who will make overarching decisions for FFI. The RLT meets quarterly. The Operations Team answers to the RLT and is made up of paid staff, which makes day-to-day decisions (via weekly meetings). In Year 4 the Regional Leadership Council included 23 community members; 3 (13%) were youth under the age of 20, 2 (9%) were over the age of 65 and 3 (13%) are racial minorities.